

## Career Path

### Of body and mind

by Dan Reeves



Maggie Tan,  
programme manager  
and senior instructor,  
mYoga  
Photo: Edde Ngan

Increasing numbers of Hong Kong people are taking to yoga today as a response to the stressful city life. Some people, like Maggie Tan, programme manager and senior instructor at mYoga, make a career out of it.

"I loved the way that the yogic movements allowed me to express myself," Ms Tan explains. "I started out taking a part-time Pilates course and then there was a period of unforced natural attraction to yoga where steps meant for each path opened up for me at just the right time. I wasn't looking for it to happen but began responding to opportunities as they presented themselves." As a result, she learned all the necessary exercises, and then started teaching a few courses in yoga. Her interest growing stronger, she then completed a formal accredited course. After working part-time for four years, she became mYoga's full-time senior instructor and manager last year.

#### Career move

When growing up Ms Tan had 11 years of ballet training, reaching Grade Seven, but reluctantly gave this up at age 17 to concentrate on her university studies. However this formative training proved valuable since it conditioned her for her rise to a yogini (female yogi).

Ms Tan holds a PhD in neuro biology. She actually entered the yoga teaching profession six years ago after an academic career doing nitty gritty laboratory stuff on cell regeneration. Born in Malaysia, she spent 17 years in Australia before coming to Hong Kong and giving up lab work. She describes her change in careers as being initially "like a trickle of water ", since she began working part-time in her new profession and only recently took on full-time responsibilities. "To begin with I was a yoga student myself and quite casual about it," she admits. But she had already decided to leave scientific work so she could spend more time with her young daughter, and was searching for a new vocation.

#### Way of life

There is "a really nice community feeling" among the clients at mYoga, says Ms Tan. "People come here and make friends, and it's really nice to see them get together and share their experiences. All this is a significant part of what I like about the profession," she adds.

**"To be good you need to be special"**

Describing the job of an instructor, she says, "The critical skills involved relating firstly to yogic abilities but it is equally important to have empathy and the ability to reach out and see the bigger picture that represents the whole of a person."

One aspect of yoga is about stilling the fluctuations of the mind, Ms Tan stresses, which is easily attached to the outside world, and a way of doing so is through physical exercise. "Yoga is more than a set of exercises, it can be a way of life — a way of being, but some people may take up yoga without this. By working with focus and concentration it comes down to calming the mind. So if you work the postures, you focus on the present and in the process become detached from the outer world. This focus can be

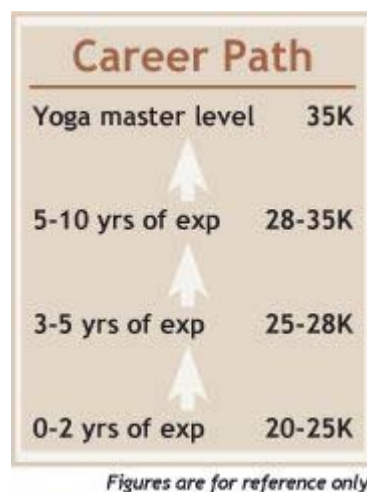
incredibly calming — almost meditative. From this platform one can go deeper into what yoga really is, but some people merely prefer to have a work-out, de-stress a little bit and find that is good enough."

### Daily routine

On a typical day, Ms Tan begins by checking emails, sorting out class schedules and clearing her desk, then teaches two to three classes. Other responsibilities include meetings with management related to operations, programming and sales, and taking a close interest in the work of other instructors. "My door is always open to the instructors and quite frequently we discuss the progress of classes, various clients, and any problems that might have arisen."

Ms Tan believes that to teach yoga, one must practice yoga and fully believe in its benefits. Citing the growth of yoga not only in Hong Kong but in other parts of Asia, she points out that there are several accredited certification programmes available in Hong Kong including the teacher training course mYoga runs with US-based yoga school Yoga Works. Any courses taken should have international quality control from the Yoga Alliance, she adds. Certification can be accomplished in three days while international quality control requires 200 hours of practice, theory and philosophy studies.

"There is a big demand for good teachers nowadays, but to be good you need to be special," says Ms Tan. "You need to make connections, and possibly have an innate sense with people, be genuine and have a real sense of what it means to be with another person." On top of everything, she concludes, one must also be a yoga advocate. "You cannot fake it."



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